

Message Text

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SUBJ: IS THE GDR GOVERNMENT BECOMING LENIENT WITH REGARD TO ESCAPEES?

REF: BERLIN 5022

1. SUMMARY: THREE RECENT EVENTS ASSOCIATED WITH ESCAPES WHICH THE WEST HAVE SUGGESTED THE POSSIBILITY THAT THE GDR GOVERNMENT MAY HAVE SOMEWHAT CHANGED ITS ATTITUDE TOWARD ESCAPEES AND THOSE INVOLVED IN ASSISTING ESCAPES FROM EAST GERMANY. AMONG OTHER THINGS, IT APPEARS THAT "FORCED ADOPTION" HAS BEEN DISCONTINUED AS A WAY OF DEALING WITH CHILDREN LEFT BEHIND IN THE GDR BY PARENTS WHO ESCAPE TO THE WEST. THE MOTIVATION BEHIND THE GDR'S HANDLING OF THESE SITUATIONS APPEARS TO HAVE A RELATION TO ITS CONCEPT OF THE COURSE OF DETENTE; TO FORWARDING THE GDR'S OWN INTERESTS IN INNER-GERMAN NEGOTIATIONS; AND TO BOLSTERING THE GDR'S INTERNATIONAL IMAGE.
END SUMMARY.

2. THREE RECENT ACTIONS BY THE GDR GOVERNMENT, REPORTED BY THE LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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WESTERN PRESS DURING THE PAST WEEK, SUGGEST A CHANGE OF LOOSEN-

ING UP OF THE GDR GOVERNMENT'S ATTITUDE TOWARD PERSONS INVOLVED IN ESCAPE ATTEMPTS FROM EAST GERMANY. ON JANUARY 21 THE GDR ANNOUNCED THE SUSPENSION OF A 2-1/2 YEAR SENTENCE FOR TWO WOMEN (WEST BERLIN AND WEST GERMAN) WHO ASSISTED A THREE-MEMBER MEDICAL DOCTOR'S FAMILY FROM DRESDEN TO ESCAPE FROM EAST GERMANY A FEW MONTHS AGO. THE WOMEN APPARENTLY HAVE ALREADY BEEN TURNED OVER TO AUTHORITIES IN WEST BERLIN ALTHOUGH THEIR TRAIL AND SENTENCING IN EAST BERLIN ONLY TOOK PLACE A FEW DAYS AGO. THE PHENOMENAL ESCAPE THROUGH CHECKPOINT CHARLIE ON JANUARY 15 OF AN UNIDENTIFIED (BUT PRESUMED EAST GERMAN) MAN BY RUNNING THROUGH THE CHECKPOINT AND VAULTING WHATEVER OBSTACLES WERE IN THE WAY IS A SECOND CASE IN POINT. IT IS STILL A MYSTERY WHY THE EAST GERMAN ARMED GUARDS DID NOT OPEN FIRE EVEN THOUGH THE MAN HAD REPORTEDLY BEEN ORDERED TO STOP BY ONE OF THE GUARDS. A THIRD INSTANCE WAS THE RECENT REVERSAL OF AN EAST BERLIN COURT DECISION IN A "FORCED ADOPTION" CASE IN WHICH A 2-1/2 YEAR OLD CHILD WAS ALLOWED TO JOIN HIS REFUGEE MOTHER IN WEST BERLIN THROUGH THE INTERVENTION OF WEST BERLIN BISHOP SCHAFT AND EAST GERMAN LAWYER, WOLFGANG VOGEL.

3. THE WEST GERMAN NEWS MAGAZINE "SPIEGEL" WHOSE PUBLICITY ON THE "FORCED ADOPTION" MATTER HAD HIGHLIGHTED THE LAST CASE MENTIONED ABOVE, HAS PUBLISHED A POSSIBLE RATIONALE FOR THIS EAST GERMAN ACTION. IN ITS JANUARY 19 ISSUE, A SHORT ARTICLE IS DEVOTED TO SPECULATION THAT THE GDR GOVERNMENT IS BEING LENIENT WITH REGARD TO BORDER CROSSERS NOWADAYS IN THE EXPECTATION THAT THE SOVIET LEADERSHIP WILL REAFFIRM, AT THE CPSU CONGRESS IN FEBRUARY, ITS DEDICATION TO DETENTE. THE "SPIEGEL" SPECULATES THAT THE GDR GOVERNMENT, IN ORDER TO BE CONSISTENT WITH THE SOVIET LINE, IS SHOWING LENIENCY IN CASES WHICH UNTIL RECENTLY WOULD HAVE BEEN DEALT WITH SEVERELY BY EAST GERMAN AUTHORITIES. THE "SPIEGEL" EVEN QUOTES A MEMBER OF THE CHANCELLERY STAFF IN BONN TO THE EFFECT THAT "FORCED ADOPTION" IS BEING DISCONTINUED "GENTLY AND QUIETLY" BY THE GDR GOVERNMENT.

4. COMMENT: WHILE "FORCED ADOPTION" RESULTING IN THE CHANGE OF A CHILD'S NAME TO THAT OF HIS NEW PARENTS APPARENTLY DID OCCUR IN EAST GERMANY, IT IS STILL UNCERTAIN THAT THE ADOPTIONS RESULTED FROM A DELIBERATE GDR POLICY OR FROM CONSIDERATION OF EACH ADOPTION ON A CASE-BY-CASE BASIS ACCORDING TO CURRENT GDR FAMILY LAW. IN ANY EVENT, THE RESULT OF THE RECENT PUBLIC CONTROVERSY LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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WOULD SEEM TO BE AN ENCOURAGING SIGN THAT THE GDR GOVERNMENT IS WILLING TO BE LENIENT WHEN ITS NEW STATUS AND IMAGE IN THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY ARE AT STAKE. OTHER SOURCES SUGGEST THAT WEST GERMAN REACTION TO SUCH AN INFLAMMATORY SUBJECT AS "FORCED ADOPTION" HAS INFLUENCED THE GDR GOVERNMENT TO REVISE ITS PRACTICES IN LIGHT OF WHAT IT EXPECTS TO GAIN FROM INNER GERMAN NEGOTIATIONS. ALSO, AS THE "SPIEGEL" HAS SUGGESTED, SUCH A REVERSAL OF PAST TREATMENT OF REFUGEES MAY ALSO BE A SIGNAL THAT THE GDR REGIME HOPES TO

GAIN A GOOD DEAL FROM A CONTINUATION OF DETENTE, AND IS PURPOSELY DISCONTINUING "FORCED ADOPTION" AS NOT BEING IN STEP WITH THE CHANGING TIMES.

WHATEVER THE REASONS FOR THE GDR'S CURRENT ATTITUDE TOWARD ESCAPEES, AND WHETHER OR NOT LENIENCY TOWARD ESCAPEES IS LIKELY TO BECOME GDR POLICY EVEN ON A SELECTIVE BASIS, THERE APPEARS TO BE LITTLE LIKELIHOOD THAT BORDER CONTROL MEASURES WILL BE RELAXED OR THAT EXODUS FROM THE GDR, LEGAL OR OTHERWISE, WILL BE MADE EASIER.COOPER

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